

Believe

KNOWING JESUS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

PART TWO

NBC

NARRABEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

KNOWING *JESUS* IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

PART TWO

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WEEK ONE // JOHN 4:1-26

READ JOHN 4:1-6

ISRAEL & SAMARIA

Before we go any further, we need to talk about Samaria. Rewind the story about 800 years. The kingdom of Israel had been divided after the death of Solomon into two parts: Judah in the south and Israel (retaining its name with Samaria as its capital) in the north. The northern kingdom of Israel largely adopted foreign gods to worship, leading to the rise of the prophets (people who spoke God's truth to a people who had abandoned Him). Israel did not heed their warnings and the kingdom of Assyria, in 722BC invaded Israel and either killed or enslaved its inhabitants, leaving only a small population behind.

Assyria then shipped in other foreigners to settle in Israel...many of whom intermarried with the local Jewish people. To the people in the south, all the events convinced them that their northern neighbours had been unfaithful to the LORD (hence their destruction) and had compromised their faith and culture (by intermarrying with foreigners). Over time this people group came to be known as "Samaritans". In ancient Jewish writings, Samaritans were "half-breeds" who abandoned Yahweh and therefore should be avoided at all costs. Upstanding Jews, when travelling between Galilee in the far north and Jerusalem in the far south, instead of taking a direct route through Samaria (in between the two), would go east over the Jordan River, then north, and finally turn west into Galilee, just so they could avoid Samaria and its "sinful" inhabitants all together.

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Despite these labels put on them by their Jewish kin, the evidence we have seems to indicate that Samaritans actually thought they and not the Jews were the true keepers of the covenant. They even established their own temple at Mt. Gerizim (near where this story takes place) where they carried on their own worship of God. Whatever their views, however correct or incorrect they were, both the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along. But more importantly for our context, both groups of people did not seem to really understand what it meant to know and live for God (as seen in the Jewish teacher Nicodemus in John 3 and a Samaritan woman in chapter 4).

Based on what you just read (above), did Jesus have to go through Samaria (verse 4)?

If Jesus had the opportunity to go another way, but specifically chose not to, what does that tell us about the importance of that place, at that time? Was it coincidence that brought Jesus there?



READ JOHN 4:7-15

Why do you think this woman came to get water at noon (the hottest part of the day)?

How does Jesus go from addressing need the woman has from a superficial level to a deeper level?

How does Jesus resonate (finding mutual agreement), dissonate (lovingly disagreeing with someone's story) and bring the gospel (transforming the dialogue entirely) to this conversation?

What would this look like to do in the conversations you and I have every day with those around us?

What is the woman's reaction to Jesus' offer (verse 15)?

READ JOHN 4:16-26

Why do you think Jesus changes the subject in verse 16 when in verse 15, it seems like she was interested in what he was offering?

Although her immediate need was for water, do you think Jesus was addressing a more important need? How so?

In verse 17, Jesus reveals the truth that explains why the woman came to draw water at noon. The most basic conclusion we can draw about her is that she is sexually promiscuous (something greatly looked down upon in that day). Some interpreters think she may even be a prostitute. So the reason she came in the middle of the day is because she knows no one else would be around, meaning she wouldn't have to face scorn and ridicule from others in the town.

Essentially, she has three strikes against her: she's a woman (considered not equal to a man back then), she was a Samaritan woman (and therefore an enemy to the Jews) and she was a Samaritan woman with a scandalous history.

This makes verse 4 (Jesus HAD to go through Samaria) even more striking. We know he didn't have to go through Samaria, but he did anyway, to be here, at this certain well and this exact time of the day... to specifically meet with this woman.

What does that say about how Jesus operates? Did she come to the well looking for Jesus? Or was Jesus looking for her?

When Jesus goes deep with her in verse 18, the woman changes the subject. How does Jesus again resonate, dissonate and bring good news to this conversation?

The deepest truth finally is revealed in the woman's response in verse 25. She's not just looking for water or for a fulfilling relationship, but for God to come and make sense of everything.

***JESUS NEVER INSULTS HER, JUDGES HER OR
BELITTLES HER, BUT AT EVERY TURN, DRAWS
THE CONVERSATION BACK TO HIMSELF.
HE IS THE ONE SHE REALLY LONGS FOR.***

If Jesus went out of his way to reach out to a foreign, fractured and nameless woman in order that he might give her what she is really looking for, how does that instruct how WE should act as his followers?

Where or who is your "Samaria"?

Jesus loves the people the world loves to hate and ignore. What would it look like for you to seek people like this out this week?

NOTES...

WEEK TWO // JOHN 4:27-42

In the previous study, we found Jesus in Samaria (a people culturally and theologically at odds with their Jewish neighbours), speaking with a scandalous woman at a well. This woman, we found, has journeyed to draw water during the hottest part of the day so that she could potentially avoid the stares and ridicule from others. But it is here, in this place, at this time that Jesus purposefully comes to specifically meet with her. This is not coincidence, but divine appointment. Although she was not seeking Jesus, he was seeking her. And through their conversation, Jesus illustrates the movement of discipleship: inviting her from wrestling with natural, everyday things to supernatural, eternal things.

READ JOHN 4:27-30

How do the disciples respond to this scene? What sort of prejudice do you think they have about this conversation?

Have you ever viewed someone with a prejudice that stopped you from engaging that person with the gospel? What did you learn from that experience?

What is symbolic about the woman "leaving her water jar" (verse 28)? What could this perhaps signify? What did the woman come to the well looking to fetch...and what did she end up fetching instead?

From her comment in verse 29, it is obvious Jesus and this woman had a longer conversation than was recorded. The juxtaposition of the reference to the "Messiah" to "a man who told me everything I ever did" is not accidental either. The Messiah, as we've explored in previous studies, is translated in the Old Testament as "Anointed One" and it specifically spoke of God returning to set things right again. In other words she is

THE MESSIAH

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The Messiah, as we've explored in previous studies, is translated in the Old Testament as "Anointed One" and it specifically spoke of God returning to set things right again. In other words she is saying "Come, and see a man who told me everything I ever did (all the mistakes I've made, all the ways I've messed up)...could this be the One who is going to set things (and me) right again?" Most likely, the people in her town would already have known about "everything she ever did". It was this second, unspoken yet assumed part about JESUS setting HER (and all things) right again that piqued their interest.

Why would the people of this town be interested in the Messiah?

Why would the people around YOU be interested in someone who knew all about them and was coming to set things right again?

READ JOHN 4:31-38

We return now to a common motif in John's Gospel – the truth that Jesus brings over against the people who can't seem to understand it (see John 1:5 and 1:10 as introducing this theme). We've seen this in discussions about wine and the temple (chapter 2), new birth (John 3), water (in the beginning of John 4), and now food here.

Why do you think the disciples (who we already know have seen Jesus at work and heard him speak) don't get what Jesus is talking about? Shouldn't they understand him by now?

Do you ever find yourself realising you've missed the point of who Jesus is or what Jesus does? How?

Does your "food" – the thing you need to survive and live off of daily, ever look like the "food" Jesus is talking about in verse 24?

What is Jesus talking about when he says "I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour."? Who are the "others"?

Jesus is also saying that normal agricultural practice is that you plant something and wait and months later the crop grows and is ready to be harvested. But something has changed since his arrival – the waiting period is over. What does this mean for us and this world?



READ JOHN 4:39-42

There are two components of faith mentioned here:

**FAITH IN
SEEING JESUS
AT WORK IN THIS
WOMAN'S LIFE**

(verse 39)



**FAITH
EXPERIENCED
FOR ONE'S SELF**

(verses 41-42)

What's the difference between the two?

Is your faith based around someone else's faith (like the faith of your parents or your pastor, etc.) or have you wrestled with Jesus yourself?

This speaks of the power of our words and actions. We ultimately want people to come to faith because of our witness (like the belief they had because of the woman's testimony) and then end up making their faith their own (because they have met Jesus themselves). These townspeople would NOT have believed in Jesus if they had not first heard about him from someone else. And their conclusion is fantastic – Jesus is not just her saviour or their saviour, but the Saviour of the whole world. This is good news for everyone!

Are you living, in any way, like this woman? That you have met someone who knows everything about you, who has come specifically for you, who can make you right, who is good news to the world and you cannot help BUT share him with your entire town (the world you inhabit)? Why or why not?

**WHO IS ONE PERSON YOU WILL SHARE
JESUS WITH THIS WEEK?**

WEEK THREE // JOHN 4:43-54

READ JOHN 4:43-48

Jesus has now left Samaria, where we read he was not only welcomed by “outsiders” but people came to believe in him. He returns to his home region, Galilee, where we are told two opposing things: a prophet has no honour in his home town (v. 44) and the Galileans welcomed him (v. 45).

How can he have no honour and be welcomed at the same time?

Based on verse 45, what kind of person did these Galileans think Jesus was? Were they interested in knowing him deeply (like the Samaritans earlier in the chapter) or were they interested in Jesus for some other reason?

In verse 46, the audience is rewound back to the wedding scene in John 2, where Jesus transformed water into wine. John calls this Jesus’ first “sign” and the result was that his disciples put their faith in him. What is the purpose of a sign? Is it to point to itself or something else?

In verse 47, a man who, we might assume, was at the aforementioned wedding and knew about Jesus, approaches him with a desperate request – his son lay dying and he begs Jesus to heal him. This royal official walked a full day’s journey from his home town, Capernaum, hoping to seek Jesus out in Cana. This is a portrait of someone in deep distress.

Yet despite this, Jesus seems to respond rather harshly in verse 48. Why do you think Jesus answers this way?

This royal official stands in a long line of people in John's Gospel who we might call "privileged". This group of people includes officials in the Temple (John 2), Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee (John 3), and Jewish leaders (all throughout John). These are all people with some degree of power, wealth or influence – people whom others believed would have it all together, would be a part of the "in" crowd. Yet throughout John's Gospel, it is clear that there is a failure by this group to truly grasp who Jesus is. This stands starkly against those we might consider outsiders – who seem to clearly understand and respond appropriately to Jesus – the Samaritan woman in John 4, a paraplegic man in John 5, a child in John 6, an adulterous woman in John 8, a blind man in John 9, etc.).

If this is the case, do you think the royal official is approaching Jesus because he is interested in who Jesus is or simply what he can do?

In what ways are you like this royal official?

READ JOHN 4:49-54

Just an interesting note that isn't easily detectable in our English translations. In verse 49, when the royal official requests Jesus to come back to his town to rescue his dying son, he is not asking politely. The verb "come down" is in the imperative tense, which means this is a command, not an earnest plea.

Have you ever spoken this way toward Jesus? That you were just so desperate and impatient, you needed Jesus to respond right then and there? What makes us respond this way? What was the result for you?

Despite this man's lack of interest in Jesus for who he was (instead just caring about what he can do), how does Jesus respond? Why do you think Jesus reacts this way?

Again, the Greek text reveals something more about the official's response. In verse 50 where the text says "The man took Jesus at his word and departed" literally reads "The man believed the word of Jesus was true and departed." The word for "believe" in the Greek is *pisteuo* and it is a very prominent word through John's Gospel. In almost every story in John, there is a question as to if and how people will respond to Jesus – will they have genuine belief in him (and therefore place their trust in him) or not? It appears this royal official initially came not because of his belief in who Jesus was (God's Son come into the world to set everything right), but his belief in the miraculous things Jesus can do. Based on verse 50, however, it appears his "belief" is changing, transforming.

RE-READ VERSE 53 AGAIN

Here we see this word "believe" (*pisteuo*) again. The official DOESN'T believe in Jesus when he discovered his son was healed (verse 52) – a belief in Jesus' miracles. But verse 53 indicates that he and his whole household DID believe in Jesus (the transformative type of belief). If the healing of his son is not what caused his belief, what did? How must this man have understood Jesus at this point that he didn't quite understand before?

Verse 54 states this was the second “sign” Jesus performed (the first sign took place when Jesus transformed water into wine in John 2). We know, however, that Jesus did lots of other miraculous things through his ministry, yet John does not call these things “signs”. What is significant about these signs as opposed to the other amazing things Jesus does?

This story stands side by side with the conversions of the Samaritans earlier in the chapter. Jesus did not do any miraculous things in Samaria, yet a multitude of people came to believe in him. Jesus now returns home to his native culture and we are told (from the start) that the reception of him is quite different.

***THOSE MOST FAMILIAR WITH JESUS SEEM
TO UNDERSTAND HIM THE LEAST, WHILE
THOSE “OUTSIDERS” INSTANTLY SEEM
TO RESONATE WITH HIM AND HAVE DEEP
FAITH AND LOVE FOR HIM.***

Have you become so familiar with Jesus, like these Galileans, that you no longer are amazed at who Jesus is, that you believe in Jesus for simply what he does (rather than who he is), that your life doesn't seem to look any different than those around you?

If that describes you, how do you reclaim the same kind of transformative faith described in this chapter?

WEEK FOUR // JOHN 5:1-30

READ JOHN 5:1-9

Fun discussion starter: what happened to verse 4? (If you are really troubled by this, go talk to one of your pastors ☺)

Who initiates this conversation? Why is that important?

If there were “a great number of disabled people” huddled around this pool, why didn’t Jesus heal any of them?

The omitted verse 4 gives us some background – the disabled gathered around this pool believing that at certain times of the year an angel would come down and stir the water. The first person who entered the pool when this happened would be healed. But because of his condition, this man was not fast enough to get himself to the pool. For thirty-eight years he waited and hoped for his chance.

What prompted Jesus to pick out this man to heal?

What must it have felt like to be free of your ailment after 38 years of suffering?

READ JOHN 5:9-15

Yet the text immediately calls a halt to this man's joy. Verse 9 indicates the day this happened to occur on was the Sabbath. What is Sabbath, why is it important and why, in verse 10, was this man not allowed to "carry his mat"? (see Exodus 20:8-11)

The man does not seem to care about what day of the week it was (verse 11) – all he knows is he is well! But the Jewish leaders continue to press him to find the man who was responsible.

SOMETHING IS GREATLY AMISS.

Jesus finds the man again in verse 14. What does he say to the man? Is Jesus threatening him? Or is perhaps Jesus indicating that the man's physical condition is not as important as his spiritual one?

Earlier we were asked the question why Jesus didn't seem to heal everyone at the pool. In verse 15, we see a repeated pattern in John's Gospel. Jesus could have healed multiple people (and perhaps did), but the text draws our attention to this one man. The man then goes out and spreads the word about Jesus – he is functioning as his representative. We may want to ask the question why Jesus doesn't go to everyone, but the text fills in our answer: because we are meant to go with his transformative power (his Spirit) in us to others.

IS THIS TRUE OF YOUR LIFE?

Do you often sit and wonder why Jesus isn't doing something in someone's life when maybe the answer is that he wants to send you?

READ JOHN 5:16-18

This is the first (of several) law court scenes that happen in John's Gospel. These verses follow a "crime" that took place earlier in the chapter – a man being healed on the Sabbath. The criminal (Jesus), is now identified and the prosecution (persecution) begins.

What are the two claims of evidence the Jewish leaders put Jesus to trial on?

There are two great ironies happening in this chapter. The first revolves around Jewish festivals. In the opening chapters of John's Gospel, John wants to remind the audience that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish symbols (ceremonial washing, rabbis, the Temple, a well). He now wants to tell us that Jesus is the fulfillment of various Jewish festivals. Sabbath was a weekly festival meant to enjoy the goodness of God, to be refreshed, to live and act as image bearers of God (see Genesis 2:1-2).

How do we see Jesus living out what the Sabbath is meant to be? How do we see the Jewish leaders get it wrong?

The second irony is because of Jesus' works and claims, these Jewish leaders decide to put Jesus on trial. They believe they hold the final authority to judge and dispense justice. But according to Jesus, they've gotten it backwards. It's not him on trial. It's them. The world is on trial. John 3:19 reminds us: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

How can it be that these “enlightened” leaders who supposedly know the most about God and God’s Word could misunderstand who Jesus is (and who they were)?

In what ways do you think you know better than Jesus? How often do you put Jesus, instead of yourself under the microscope?

NOTES...

WEEK FIVE // JOHN 5:19-47

If the first half of John 5 is the beginning of criminal case of Jesus where the prosecutors have made their stand, the second half of John 5 is Jesus' defense. He makes a three-point argument, flipping the whole case on its end. The three points are: 1) Jesus describing the nature of his work and existence, 2) Jesus calling witnesses to his defense and 3) Jesus prosecuting his opponents.

READ JOHN 5:19-30

Jesus begins by explaining himself and why he is doing the things he is doing to his prosecutors.

Who, exactly, does Jesus equate himself to?

In verses 19-23, Jesus draws a picture anyone can understand. Children model themselves after their parents. A son sees who a father is and what a father does and emulates him. In the same way, a father loves his son and lets him in on what he is doing. In other words, a father and a son sound and look a lot alike.

How would this have been a radical claim for Jesus to make?

Jesus is essentially saying (as he does elsewhere): if you see me and what I am doing, you will see Whom? And therefore if you reject me and what I am doing, who are you actually rejecting?

In verses 24-26, we see two of John's favourite words come together: believe and life. Based on what you have studied in John so far, what does he mean by this two words? How do they relate to one another?

Jesus' main point here is that he is allowed to heal on the Sabbath (one of the crimes he was charged with) because he is God's Son, which give him exempt status and special privileges and authority – and all this is a GOOD thing because we have someone who is offering us life (the very life meant to be cherished and celebrated on the Sabbath).

Jesus first evidence submitted is his life that matches the life of the Father. If he wasn't and couldn't do what God does, he would be a liar and therefore guilty of the charges and condemnable to death under the Jewish law.

READ JOHN 5:31-47

In the Jewish courtroom, testimony had to be corroborated by two or three witnesses, otherwise it was considered invalid. After having explained why he is able to do incredible things (bring life on the Sabbath) and say incredible things (he is the Son of God). But knowing his first argument may not be enough to sway his detractors, Jesus lines up five witness to back up his defense.

Who/what are the five witnesses Jesus brings forward? (hint: see verses 32, 33, 36, 39 and 46).

How do these witnesses all support Jesus' life and work?

If Jesus is correct and these five witnesses all agree with who he is and what he is doing, why do you think these religious scholars do not recognise Jesus? How is that possible?

Has there ever been a time in your life where it was clear Jesus was present but you did not recognise him? Explain.

Does this ever happen in your everyday life? That God is at work or wants to work in some situation or relationship but you don't see it?

In verses 41-47, Jesus flips the case on its head. He has proved his point and the witness testimony all agree. He has been excused from the dock. But Jesus says the case isn't over. Who, does Jesus indicate, is really on trial?

How is it that Jesus is talking to people who claim to be the pinnacle of godliness and plainly tells them "you do not have the love of God in your hearts"? How can that be true that the most religious people around have no love of God active in their life?

DOES THAT STATEMENT EVER DESCRIBE YOU?

What indictment does Jesus level at his accusers in verse 44? Are you now, happy to accept praise from others at the expense of wanting praise from God?

How do you often miss the forest for the trees like the Jewish leaders here (verse 47)? Where do you get trapped in seemingly doing all the right things FOR God without actually caring about your relationship with God?

NOTES...

WEEK SIX // JOHN 6:1-15

READ JOHN 6:1-4

The next scene we are taken to revolves around the Jewish Passover Festival (verse 4).

What is significant about this festival?

THE PASSOVER

Exodus chapters 12 to 17 explain the history behind the Passover. The basic story is the Passover is God's deliverance of His people from slavery and death. The larger story is called "the exodus" – the story of a compassionate and powerful God who does incredible things – defeating the mighty Egyptians, guiding His people with fire and cloud, walking through the sea, providing food in the desert. Every year (and still to this day) the Jewish people gather together and retell this story of who they were (slaves) and who God is (the mighty rescuer) and this gets celebrated with a special meal of unleavened bread.

In John 5 we saw Jesus demonstrated himself to be the ultimate fulfillment of another Jewish celebration: the Sabbath. Now on the eve of the biggest festival of Judaism, Jesus wants to disclose even more of his nature.

READ JOHN 6:5-13

Why do you think Jesus "tests" Philip? What is the point of this?

What does Philip's response in verse 7 show us about how much/little he has understood about Jesus to this point?

If Jesus has changed water into wine (John 2), transformed an entire town (John 4), healed a paraplegic (John 5), and healed the sick (John 6:2), why is it that Philip doesn't seem to think Jesus can do anything about feeding this crowd of people?

READ JOHN 6:1-4

Do you ever find yourself saying similar things – not believing Jesus is capable of doing something even though you have seen him do it in the past?

Does Jesus ever ask YOU questions like this today?

Peter retrieves a boy from the crowd who is willing to give up his lunch for Jesus. How does the boy's faith (we can assume) contrast the faith of the disciples?

FUN SPECULATION: WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS SCENE ACTUALLY LOOKED LIKE? HOW DID THESE THINGS GET MULTIPLIED?

READ 2 KINGS 4:42-44 AND EXODUS 16:1-5

What are the similarities between these stories and the one taking place here in John 6? What is John trying to tell us about Jesus?

What possible symbolic interpretation might we conclude from the leftover baskets numbering twelve? And why does Jesus throw in the line "Let nothing be wasted"? What does that line say about Jesus' desire to provide?

READ JOHN 6:14-15

How does the crowd react to this event?

Compare this with Deuteronomy 18:15-19. For Jews who closely read the Law, these verses in Deuteronomy spoke of the "next Moses" – one like him but with even greater authority.

The Jews recognise Jesus as this Prophet, yet he escapes from them Why? What is going on here?

Gary M Burge, the author of the NIV Application Commentary on John puts it this way: "The crowd fits Jesus into their religious categories ('This is the prophet!') and decide that they can control, promote, and fashion something religiously constructive out of this event. They want Jesus for their own ends; they want to pursue a political agenda (revolution? Social upheaval? Dissent?) and Jesus must flee. In the end the picture is penetratingly clear: They have no clue what they have just witnessed."

The crowd does understand something powerful about Jesus, even equating him with the Prophet that was spoken of to come...yet their understanding leads to the wrong reaction – forcing Jesus to fit into their personal desires.

How do you respond the same as the crowd?

How is it that we can recognise who Jesus is but respond to him the wrong way?

What should YOUR appropriate response to be to Jesus?

What was Jesus' response to this? What does this tell US about how we should respond when the world tries to overwhelm us?

NOTES...

WEEK SEVEN // JOHN 6:16-26

As stated in the previous study, John 6 occurs around the time of the Jewish Passover Festival. Two of the main images brought to mind during the Passover were God's supernatural provision of bread and His safe guidance through the sea (spoken about in Exodus 12-17). Earlier in John 6, we see Jesus fulfilling the first of these Passover images. We're now about to get a glimpse at him fulfilling the second.

READ JOHN 6:16-21

The Sea of Galilee is still known for its torrid winds caused by a confluence of arid desert gusts and cooler Mediterranean breezes. The disciples (without Jesus, who had taken some time to get refreshed), made the journey from one side of the lake to the other. A crazy wind whipped up and forced them to row the boat in order to stabilize the vessel.

Yet despite this life-threatening situation they found themselves in, the text says it wasn't the wind or waves they were afraid of.

What was it that terrified the disciples so?

Why do you think the disciples reacted this way? If you saw someone walking on the water would you be scared or amazed?

There is clearly something else going on here. Read Psalm 107:23-30 and Psalm 77:16-20. What is the message of these psalms? Who is the one who has control over the winds and the water? Who is the one who guides those on the sea to safe ground?

How does this then relate the disciples fear of Jesus? Who are they starting to recognise he is?

Jesus' response seems very natural considering the circumstances: "It is I; don't be afraid." But again, something big is behind these words. Throughout the Bible (and in the Old Testament in particular), whenever a human being has an encounter with God in His fullness, what is the typical reaction they have? (hint: Exodus 14:31, 20:18, Jonah 1:15-16, Isaiah 6:1-5, Luke 1:28-30, etc.).

IN MOST OF THESE PASSAGES, GOD WILL RESPOND WITH "FEAR NOT" OR "DON'T BE AFRAID." A HOLY GOD HAS VISITED YOU, BUT HE WILL NOT DESTROY YOU, BUT COMFORT AND HELP YOU.

In John's Gospel, Jesus uses a certain phrase in several key places to say something about himself. In the original Greek, that phrase is ego eimi which translates as "I am." We will see this later on (I am the bread of life, I am the good shepherd, I am the way, etc.). Whenever Jesus says this phrase, it's not merely a collection of words he chooses to speak – but it relates to a deeper theological truth. In Exodus 3, Moses encounters God on a mountain (the burning bush scene). He, like the disciples here, is afraid (Exodus 3:6), but God says not to worry – God is going to send Moses to rescue His people from slavery. Moses then objects. One of the questions Moses asks God is what the name of this sending God is. In Exodus 3:14 God responds, "I Am." That word is the Hebrew word Yahweh (translated as the LORD in all caps in our English translations). "I Am" is God's name for Himself – the One who is alive, who always was, is and will be. Life itself. So when Jesus uses this same phrase "I Am" what He is doing is invoking God's Name for himself. The same Yahweh who spoke and worked in power in the time of our ancestors is here now.

So when Jesus says, “It is I” the actual Greek says ego eimi – “I Am.” The LORD who allowed you to walk through the sea safely all those years ago is here. And I will help you do it again. So, as you’re used to hearing God say in these situations, “Don’t be afraid.”

Textual aside: How do these two phrases speak into powerful truth into our lives, especially when things are a bit stormy?

READ JOHN 6:22-26.

What sort of reaction is provoked from Jesus’ reputation alone?

Is there something wrong with wanting Jesus to meet our physical needs? What is the danger in coming to Jesus for this reason?

If Jesus doesn’t want people coming to him because of the miraculous things he is doing, why does he do them in the first place?

Are you interested in Jesus for who he is or simply what he offers?

WEEK EIGHT // JOHN 6:24-59


 READ JOHN 6:24-40

 LAMB OF GOD

This story continues the narrative revolving around the Passover celebration that began at the start of chapter 6. The author's intent over the next few chapters is to demonstrate how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of all the big Jewish festivals – that the thing they celebrate is actually Jesus. The Passover happened during the exodus from Egypt – that God was sustaining and guiding and providing and rescuing His people out of their slavery. Two events associated with this are God's provision of bread (mana) in the wilderness as well as God's allowing the people to walk across the water to safety. Jesus has just done both of those things earlier in the chapter. There is obvious intrigue into who this Jesus must be...

In verses 26-29, what is Jesus challenging his listeners to "do"?

After feeding 5,000 men (not counting women and children) and walking on water (two clear feats only God can do) why does the crowd still not believe in Jesus except if he does another sign (verse 30)? How many things does Jesus have to do to convince these people?

What is the problem with believing in the signs rather than the person the signs point to? Why will that sort of "belief" never really take hold?

In verse 32 Jesus corrects a misconception the people have – Moses did not provide bread from heaven, God did. This bread gives life. How do the people respond to this news (verse 34)?

Verses 35 and 36 stand as sad polar opposites. Jesus declares “I am” (that’s implying God’s name Yahweh again – as seen in the previous study) the bread of life. Yet the people have seen it but still do not believe it.

What do you think Jesus means by calling himself the bread of life? What does he mean about never being hungry or thirsty?

If the people are so desperate for what Jesus is talking about (verse 34), and he will never drive those away who come to him (verse 37), and he gives life to all who look to him (verse 40), why do the people still don’t believe? What is it exactly they “believe” about Jesus and why is their belief in him deficient?



READ JOHN 6:41-50

Jesus’ statement about HIM being the bread of life that came down from heaven instantly strikes a negative chord with the crowd. What issue do they have with Jesus?

The response of the crowd is an argument that is still floating around today. The argument is this: Jesus was an extraordinary teacher and even did miraculous things, but ultimately, he was just a human. A human certainly cannot be God, and if for some reason he was God, he would look and act differently than he did.

What is your response to this accusation?

Jesus makes a clear point. If you really knew and pursued God, you would come to me (because the Father and Son work in tandem). All the things the Old Testament prophets spoke about is happening right now, it's here. You have a choice. Believe in the thing Moses and the prophets point to (the bread of life) or keep pursuing bread that doesn't ultimately fill you up and die.

***IT'S TIME TO ASK YOURSELF A HARD QUESTION:
WHICH CHOICE DO YOU MAKE EACH DAY?***

These are supposedly faithful Jews who knew and tried to follow the Hebrew scriptures. They honestly believed they were doing this "faith" thing right. Yet by their own confession (as seen throughout John's Gospel) and their actions speak otherwise – they say they believe in God, but are more interested in momentary satisfaction.

***ARE YOU SOMEONE THAT SAYS YOU FOLLOW
JESUS, BUT THE MAJORITY OF YOUR TIME
AND ENERGY AND MONEY AND THOUGHTS ARE
DIRECTED SOMEWHERE ELSE?***

What is the end result of living this way (verse 50)?

READ JOHN 6:51-59

What in the world is Jesus talking about here? It seems he was speaking in metaphorical language before, but now seems to indicate that's not the case – that you actually need to eat his flesh and drink his blood to experience this eternal life he's speaking about. What do you do with this?

Scholars have proposed many theories as to what Jesus means in this section. Some believe he is talking about Communion (bread = Jesus' body, wine = Jesus' blood). But this does not make any sense to the crowd because the event of the Last Supper had not yet happened. Others believe he is speaking of himself as the Passover Lamb that is killed and sacrificed so that people may live. This may be a little closer to the meaning of Jesus' words, but Jews considered drinking blood forbidden by God.

The clue may be to compare John 6:54 to John 6:40. What are the similarities in these two verses?

The references to "looking up at the Son" (v. 40) and the spilling of blood (v. 54) most likely refer to Jesus' upcoming death. Jesus is saying that you cannot experience this eternal life he speaks about unless you BELIEVE (v. 40) in Jesus' impending sacrifice on the cross. Even the Jews would understand the idea of something/one sacrificed so that someone else may live. The Greco-Roman world would often partake of the flesh and blood of the sacrificed animal as a symbol of ingesting and internalizing its saving power for yourself. But Jesus is not expecting people to ingest his actual flesh and blood to save them – but do so through believing in him and his sacrifice for us on the cross.

We are called to let this reality sink deep down into us (like eating and drinking something sinks into our gut) and let us transform us. The people (as we'll find out next study) did not understand or appreciate what Jesus was telling them. What about you?

WEEK NINE // JOHN 6:60-71

READ JOHN 6:48-61

Jesus had been speaking to a large, diverse crowd of people (v. 24). This group would probably consist of random people drawn to what was happening, the local Jewish audience, people who have been following Jesus during his ministry and the twelve followers Jesus personally appointed.

After hearing this difficult teaching about Jesus being the bread of life (see last study), WHO starts grumbling about Jesus specifically?

What is startling or surprising about this?

Have you ever second guessed if following Jesus was really worth it (or know someone who has)? What makes this crowd frustrated with Jesus? What is it that make people frustrated with him?

READ JOHN 6:62-65

How is it that Jesus can have “disciples” (verse 61) who do not believe in him (verse 64). How is that possible? Do you think this is true of you? Is it true of your church?

Jesus reminds his followers again: there is a difference between the flesh and the Spirit. That word flesh in the Greek is the word sarx and often used in the Bible to describe humanity hostile to God, living for material rather than eternal things. The word "life" used by Jesus is the Greek word zoe. It refers to "animated life" or life that is living its full potential. This is opposed to another Greek word for life - bios, which means the structure to make life possible. You might think of it this way. It is possible to have a body (bios) but unless that body has a heart that is pumping blood through it (zoe), all you really have is a carcass. Jesus and the biblical authors want us to know that unless we have been given the zoe life of the Spirit to animate us, we are simply bodies (bios) who are covered in flesh (sarx) that is subject to decay.

READ JOHN 6:66-71

What must be going through these disciples' minds to turn away and no longer follow Jesus?

WHAT (IF ANYTHING) WOULD MAKE YOU TURN AWAY FROM JESUS?

What reason does Peter give to staying with Jesus? Do you think Peter really understood what he was saying?

Yet even out of the small group that remained, Jesus indicates some (in this case, Judas) will betray him. The rest, we are told later, either deny or abandon

Jesus. Why is it so hard to remain loyal to Jesus?

What are the things that cause you to betray/deny/abandon Jesus? Think of it both on a big scale and a micro scale. Where do you struggle to understand and follow Jesus in life? In what areas of your life (like your finances, your time, your relationships, your recreation, your work, etc.) do you struggle to live the life Jesus has called you to?

How can your church or community group encourage, challenge and support you on a deeper level to stay connected with Jesus?

NOTES...

WEEK TEN // JOHN 7:1-36

John carries on the theme of Jesus' relationship with the major Jewish festivals. John 7 introduces another festival, Sukkoth, also known as the Festival of Tabernacles. This celebration marked the end of the autumn harvest and was a celebration of God's provision. Because these crops needed to be collected and protected, farmers would build temporary shelters in the fields as they harvested. This also called to mind the exodus event, when God's people were wandering around the wilderness living in tents, and so the Festival of Tabernacles encourages people to live in tents for a week to remember God's deliverance from Egypt.

WITH ALL THIS IN MIND, READ JOHN 7:1-13

This passage marks the beginning of the end of Jesus' ministry. From this period on, he leaves Galilee (in the north) and heads south to Judea where (based on the timing of this festival) he will spend his final six months before his arrest and death. This chapter revisits the events and conversations from Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem in John 5. We are told in John 5:18 that even then the Jewish religious leaders tried to kill him for violating the Sabbath law and saying that he was equal with God.

In verse 3, we are told about Jesus' family for the first time in John's Gospel. The other Gospel accounts also mention Jesus' family – his brothers and sisters – but these references paint the picture that there was a tense relationship between Jesus and his siblings. At one point in the story, Jesus' family tried to take custody of Jesus thinking "he is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21).

With that information in mind, what kind of statement are his brothers making in verses 3-4? Do they really think Jesus is someone special or are they poking fun at him?

What "time" is Jesus referring to in verses 6 and 8?

Why did Jesus say he wasn't going to Judea but then go anyway? Was he lying to his brothers? (Hint: in verse 8, Jesus tells us what he is NOT planning on going as. His plans are to arrive, but under a different banner).

What sort of opinions do the public have about Jesus? Are these opinions at all what people say today?



READ JOHN 7:14-24

John 7 revolves around three questions thrown at Jesus. The questions are (stated in other words):

Where did this man get his education (verse 15)?

Where is this man from (verses 25-27)?

Where is this man going (verses 35-36)?

As we move through this chapter, try and find what the common answer Jesus gives to all three of these questions is.

Most Jewish teachers (called “rabbis”) were originally students hand-chosen by an established teacher and trained in every way to think, talk and reason like that teacher. Sitting under a rabbi would usually begin in the mid-teens years and continue until a student reached 30 years of age. At that time, the student would himself be called a rabbi and then turn around and choose his own students (called disciples). There was a long and established tradition in Jewish society of attaching oneself to a reputable rabbi. A person could usually trace which rabbi someone learned from based on what their teaching was like.

Who does Jesus say is his “teacher” (verses 16-17)? What evidence does Jesus give that links him to his teacher?

In verses 19-24, Jesus makes this analysis: if the Jewish leaders are products of Moses’ teaching (carefully trying to understand the Law), they are not being obedient to their rabbi’s instructions because they do not follow the entire teaching (verse 19), nor do understand the deeper meaning that sits behind the Law (verses 22-24).

The people respond by asking another question.

READ JOHN 7:25-36

In the estimation of the crowd, why can’t Jesus be the Messiah they are waiting for (see verse 27)?

Is it possible to miss something even when God puts it right in front of your face? Has this ever happened to you?

Why does the crowd respond the way they do in verse 30? What is Jesus saying prior to this that warrants this sort of response?

How do others respond to Jesus' divine claims (verse 31)?

Where does Jesus say he's going? How does this answer line up with the other questions posed to him (where are you educated? Where are you from?).

Jesus is blunt and clear in these verses. He is here on God's authority, has been given God's power, speaks with God's voice and is fulfilling God's mission. He is not just a "good man" (v. 12), or crazy (v. 20), another man (v. 27) or just some average rabbi (v. 15). These are divine claims Jesus makes of himself. And therefore Jesus requires some sort of response from us. When God shows up in your midst, you cannot remain neutral (as seen by the division in this crowd). Will you believe? Or will you try to rid yourself of Jesus?

How ought we stand up and declare the truth about Jesus to a disbelieving world? What claims will we make? What evidence will we provide for who we say he is?

**WHO CAN YOU PRAYERFULLY SHARE JESUS WITH
THIS WEEK?**

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